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ABSTRACT

A discussion of school partnerships with linguistic minority communities (1) contextualizes and defines such partnerships, (2) notes the typical obstacles that prevent educators and communities from developing partnerships successfully, (3) highlights promising evolving practices associated with effective partnerships, (4) recommends future courses of action, and (5) provides a list of resource materials on partnerships. Obstacles affecting most school-home-community partnerships and more specifically, partnerships with language minority communities include both school- and educational system-based factors and family/community factors. Promising practices in developing partnerships include teacher- and classroom-based efforts, school- or district-level efforts, community-based efforts (businesses and labor organizations), and some contributions of teacher education institutions and educational associations. Contains 149 references, 9 toll-free and on-line information sources, and a list of 38 researchers, scholars, and practitioners with expertise in forming school-home-community partnerships. (MSE)

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Partnerships With Linguistic Minority Communities

Mary McGroarty

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Partnerships With Linguistic Minority Communities

In all major English-speaking countries, parents, politicians, educators, and community members share a sense that children are in crisis. Some children face circumstances of poverty and dangerous neighborhoods that make sheer physical survival an issue, while family stability is threatened by parents who must often work multiple jobs in order to get by. Other learners, although not faced with immediate harm, often have little access to relationships with anyone outside of their immediate families. Educators and others concerned with education are struggling with ways to identify, define, and implement effective community partnerships because of their conviction that children and families need the concerted support and involvement of all sectors of society. This perception applies to some degree to all school-age learners, not only those from language minority communities.

Interest in developing and sustaining community partnerships is growing; however, the rationales that underly effective partnerships and the precise form that these partnerships take vary from one location to another.

This professional paper

- contextualizes and defines partnerships
- notes the typical obstacles that prevent educators and communities from successfully establishing partnerships

- highlights promising evolving practices associated with effective partnerships
- recommends future courses of action
- provides a list of resource materials on partnerships

Community Partnerships: Definitions and Perspectives

What, exactly, are partnerships? The general notion of educational partnerships ranges from traditional parent-teacher organizations (often called *parent outreach* or *parent involvement*) to multiparty relationships involving teachers, students, classrooms, schools with community organizations, teacher training institutions, universities, and even businesses. These coalitions usually aim to improve the education of the student and family populations served and may also seek to restructure the curriculum and the organizational hierarchy of the school by altering both formal and informal lines of authority. Such partnerships are seen as essential to the well-being and social and academic progress of all students. They are especially important in light of the myriad problems faced by many school systems, from the alienation experienced by many learners (not only those from language minority backgrounds) to the frustration of educators who find that past ways of teaching are insufficient to engage today's students effectively.

Community partnerships are generally viewed from two perspectives. The traditional view defines school-community relations narrowly, focusing mainly on the academic outcomes related to improvement in school subjects or school attendance and persistence. School programs related to this paradigm include those that train parents in supporting children's learning through schoollike activities in the home. This remains the typical, or normative view, particularly in the eyes of most educators.

However, a more recent perspective places partnerships in a more comprehensive framework, redefining them to include not only the home and school but all other community organizations with a commit-

ment to youth and families. In this perspective, education is best served by relationships of mutual influence and respect that place parents and community members on an equal footing with school authorities. Much of the thinking and some of the activities related to such programs aim explicitly at mutual discovery and social change. This transformative perspective is beginning to raise fundamental questions about the roles and possibilities of empowerment for all involved in education, including educators, families, and other community members. Both perspectives raise significant challenges for educators and for professional organizations such as TESOL.

However partnerships are defined, they require teachers to go beyond their limited relationships and constrained contacts with individual students to identify the many other experiences relevant to students' lives. Broader conceptualizations of partnerships, to the extent they demand the construction of relationships of equality among participants, require new attitudes and behaviors from educators. Indeed, all parties with interests in productive partnerships must break new ground and forge new relationships if they wish to coordinate their efforts to better serve youth and families.

Obstacles to Effective Community Partnerships

Although some obstacles to effective partnerships with language minority communities constrain all school-home-community relationships to some degree, others are particularly salient when learners come from minority language communities. These two major categories are described below. They are not the only barriers to effective partnerships, but they are repeatedly identified by many commentators.

Obstacles Affecting Most School-Home-Community Partnerships

School- and Educational System-Based Factors

Numerous school-related factors impede formation of partnerships. They include attitudinal issues affecting both teachers and parents, rigid

organizational structures within the school, and resource concerns such as lack of time, space, and funding. The following obstacles are mentioned repeatedly by experts on school-home-community linkages:

1. lack of interest or uncertainty on the part of teachers, district, and building-level administrators about the value of and techniques for developing partnerships

2. educators' typical practices and beliefs that promote parent-family-community involvement only on the school's terms and on the school's turf in the expectation that parents should defer to educators who can unilaterally define and direct parental and community involvement

3. norms of many professional educators encouraging individualism and conflict avoidance, precluding attention to collaborative activity and creative conflict resolution

4. sharp divisions in the pre- and in-service education, organizational structures, and professional associations between those charged with the education of school-aged children and those responsible for adult education

5. absence of staff specifically hired and trained to communicate with parents

6. deficiency of teacher and administrator time dedicated specifically to developing partnerships with communities served by the school

7. high turnover rates among teachers and administrators that impede the formation and maintenance of continuing relationships with learners and their families over time

8. lack of space and other resources in the school building dedicated to parental and community concerns

9. lack of the communications infrastructure (access to telephones, voice mail, or even regular newsletters and secure mailboxes) to allow teachers and families to stay in touch

10. scheduling issues that preclude holding school meetings at times when parents and community members can come

11. expectations for parental and family involvement based on teachers' and administrators' own experiences and cultural norms that differ from those of the learners in the school

12. uncertainty as to how to listen to parents and talk with them seriously about children's education without condescension or use of professional jargon

13. lack of knowledge as to the legitimacy and extent of the involvement of any group aside from parents (e.g., a business, church group, or community association) in school activities

14. educators' narrow focus on academic activities and outcomes, to the exclusion of the cultural and moral aims that many parents and families associate with the educational process

Family-Community Factors

For many families and community members, too, there are conditions that typically hinder the formation of partnerships with the schools attended by children. Among them:

1. lack of time, particularly for households where parents have irregular employment, hold two or more jobs, or hold one job requiring long or unpredictable hours

2. absence of child care provided during proposed parental activities

3. lack of a reasonably safe neighborhood environment so that venturing out of the house—especially at night—is risky

4. inadequacy or nonexistence of transportation to schools, especially if children attend distant magnet schools in large urban areas or live in rural areas without public transportation

5. uncertainty as to how and why parents and interested others would want to or can take a role in their children's educational experiences in both academic and non-academic realms

6. uncertainty as to how parents can assist with schoolwork once children are past the early elementary years

Obstacles to Partnerships With Language Minority Communities

Most of the obstacles above also apply, in various degrees, to language minority communities. In addition, there are other factors that are especially relevant to linguistic minority learners, families, and communities.

School-Based Factors

Certain school-related factors are particularly problematic for learners whose home language and culture are not those of the school. Educators' lack of the relevant linguistic and cultural knowledge as well as the lack of personnel and materials reflecting the students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds greatly increase the probabilities for misunderstandings and failure to achieve optimal collaboration. School-related factors include

1. lack of a schoolwide commitment to including families of language minority students in all school activities

2. shortage of regular personnel and interpreters who can speak the relevant languages

3. absence of resource materials of all sorts (print, audio, video) reflecting the languages and cultural patterns relevant to the learners and their families

4. educators' reliance on stereotypes or secondary sources of information—rather than firsthand knowledge—about the learners from various language minority communities

5. educators' ignorance of the life circumstances and cultural practices of the students and families represented in the school and of the variation in individual and family patterns within language minority communities

Family-Community Factors

Some of the social and economic conditions particularly affecting language minority families and communities raise additional challenges to be addressed in developing viable partnerships. These challenges include the following:

1. lack of general knowledge about a country's school system and unfamiliarity with the local schools
2. belief that the mission of the school is strictly academic and thus separate from family and community concerns, which are best served by institutions other than the school
3. apprehension that involvement in schools will bring unwelcome attention or scrutiny to the family, particularly for families concerned with issues of legal status in the country
4. frequent changes of residence that interrupt schooling and make it difficult for families to establish lasting connections with personnel and programs at a single school
5. gender role expectations in some communities that hold children's education as the exclusive concern of the mother and female relatives
6. gender role expectations that discourage women from language minority communities from developing the language, leadership, and organizational skills needed to continue their studies, seek employment, or reach out to other parents in the community

Promoting Partnership Development With Language Minority Communities

In spite of the many structural and attitudinal obstacles to effective partnerships, some teachers, schools, families, and community groups have worked out ways to better coordinate their efforts to serve learners and families and build a more dynamic, up-to-date vision of professional efforts. What follows is a list of general categories and some of the activities associated with each. A note of caution: although little longitudinal research has been done, it is safe to state that such parental practices as listening to children read in any language are associated with improved achievement in literacy-related areas of the curriculum. Likewise, parental interest in and active promotion and support of academic achievement, often reflected in the conditions provided for doing homework, are usually associated with improved educational and social outcomes. Although family involvement also enhances other critical areas such as attendance and persistence in school, direct evidence of specific curricular impact in other subject areas beyond elementary level language and math is not available, in part because such issues have not yet been studied in detail. However, it is clear nonetheless that students whose families are actively involved in education tend to select more challenging subjects when choices are offered later in their educational careers.

The relative gaps in available information do not mean that partnerships are unimportant. Thoughtful commentators point out that an exclusive concern with students' academic achievement is exactly what is wrong with education and that, particularly in the area of school-home-community relations, the issue is not merely achievement gains but a far more complex matter of sharing the power to educate and grow together. Their belief is that more effective and equitable school-home-community relationships have a better chance of establishing the necessary conditions in which learning on everyone's part—educators as well as families—can take place. In addition, the considerable variation in student and family backgrounds and experiences within language minority communities mean that educators must call upon an array of meth-

ods and techniques to establish and maintain partnerships. Some items in the following list of promising practices are quite conventional, whereas others are relatively new, but all have the potential to promote partnerships of different kinds in different circumstances.

We list them here according to institutional level, moving from the efforts by teachers in their classrooms and by schools and school districts (called *school boards* in some countries) to those requiring the involvement of other institutions and groups. Although convenient, such distinctions can mislead, for research has clearly indicated that partnerships are only effective if they involve more than individual goodwill and intentions, and draw on the concerted actions of all parties involved (Lucas, 1997). Although individual teachers can take related actions to promote partnerships, they need the active, consistent support of other educational authorities if such efforts are to become institutionalized. In fact, current thinking on effective programs to serve children, youth, and families at risk emphasizes that only programs going beyond typical professional and institutional boundaries are likely to be successful, for the usual definitions of professionalism and bureaucratic responsibilities have generally constrained—not enhanced—the probability of sustained and successful relationships with the communities served.

Teacher- and Classroom-Based Efforts to Promote Partnerships

Classroom teachers, resource teachers, and others directly involved in the instruction of language minority students can take many steps toward establishing partnerships. Although some of these actions can be undertaken by individual teachers, the close collaboration of teachers and other school personnel, instructional aides, secretaries, and custodial staff is required to create and maintain an environment of respect that promotes the involvement of parents and community members in education. Teachers can build their repertoire of ways to discover the various types of partnerships most germane to them and their students by

1. conducting hands-on research with students and their families regarding socialization practices, family histories, beliefs about language learning, and the role of schools and parents, rather than relying on secondary sources or hearsay

2. inviting parents and other community members to share special forms of expertise, including community cultural knowledge (crafts, traditions, personal and local histories) and other specialized individual knowledge, such as occupational or artistic expertise

3. recognizing the material discovered in the two efforts described above as a critical resource for instruction in designing curricular themes, academic tasks, and materials; recycling community information throughout all curricular areas; and enlisting parent and student assistance in gathering and interpreting this information

4. making sure there are personnel who speak appropriate languages fluently and are consistently available for minority language parents who are more comfortable using a language other than English

5. inviting parents and other family and community members to visit the classroom for special "get to know each other" sessions, apart from the usual rituals of "back to school" night, and providing refreshments rather than asking parents to bring them

6. finding ways to recruit parents and family members for regular participation in non-academic activities such as field trips, holiday and civic celebrations, and schoolwide recycling campaigns so that they can experience nonthreatening means of involvement in school activities

7. posting children's work in other languages and similar classroom measures to reinforce the notion that the classroom is a place where the languages and cultures of all students and their families are welcomed and respected

8. inviting parents and families to bring special family mementos and photographs of their children to school, and using these to create

individual home-school books or portfolios for all children in the parents' languages and, if appropriate, in English (McCaleb, 1994)

9. recognizing that refugee students and families, particularly those who left their countries under difficult or traumatic circumstances, may have perspectives on language and culture that differ from those of other recent immigrants and from long-time language minority residents, and may wish to emphasize cultural and linguistic cohesion rather than distinctive cultural identities

10. having a "family corner" or "family bookshelf" with special materials (books, games, kits), in the appropriate languages and in English, that could be lent to families of students in the class; making contact with local librarians and asking them to plan appropriate family activities at libraries or with bookmobiles

11. encouraging parents to talk with students daily for at least 15 minutes and have younger students read aloud at home, in any language, at least two to four times per week

12. establishing a regular pattern of communication with parents; for example, having a special "home" folder, sending home all communications to parents on the same day of the week and in appropriate languages, and asking parents to write notes, call, or drop by in return

13. creating opportunities for parents and other interested adults to confer with the teacher about all sorts of student experiences, not just about problems the teacher perceives, and to maintain contact not just in writing but through person-to-person interaction

14. working with other teachers to establish cross-age tutoring programs in which older and younger students from the same language minority community share experiences and work together on important curricular tasks

School- or District-Based Efforts to Build Partnerships

Schools and school districts can take several steps to create conditions for effective partnerships. Administrative leadership is vital to creating a school- or districtwide climate where parents and community members are welcomed rather than ignored or resisted. Although the activities here require commitment of time and resources, the costs need not be overwhelming. Furthermore, costs (both the actual financial expenditures and the cost of personnel and various types of in-kind support) can be shared by some of the participating groups noted in the final section of this report. Schools can begin to take steps to build partnerships by

1. identifying effective partnerships as a priority for all teachers, administrators, and staff members; making a long-term and public commitment to building partnerships and demonstrating this commitment through allocation of resources

2. hiring and training personnel with the appropriate linguistic and cultural skills to build relationships with the learners' communities and giving them time to do this systematically

3. ensuring that all home-school communications are provided in the languages and language varieties used by the learners and parents in the school (this might include sending home taped messages to parents with low literacy skills)

4. making permanent space available in the school building at convenient times for parents and community members wishing to participate formally and informally in the life of the school

5. having quick and efficient access to current information in appropriate languages as to the social services needed by learners and their families in such areas as housing, health care, and job training; making timely contacts in appropriate languages so that families receive prompt help from social service agencies

6. providing classes, if requested by parents, in areas such as first language literacy, child development, ESL, General Equivalency Diploma (GED) preparation, or vocational training

7. providing special orientation sessions and materials, in the appropriate languages and led by appropriate facilitators (e.g., parents of the same language group with longer residence in the area), for parents who are new to the country and unfamiliar with the organization of education in their new place of residence

8. ensuring availability of child care for any classes or school functions that parents are invited to attend

9. tapping the insights of all school staff members who might be members of language minority communities (administrators, teachers, custodians, cafeteria staff) to identify community organizations and resources relevant for the students

10. enlisting the school or district librarian in building up collections of children's literature and other materials in appropriate languages in school libraries and asking the librarian to help train teachers and families to select materials and read together

11. establishing a regularly available communication system, such as voice mail or use of a newsletter or interactive journal, so that teachers and families may communicate with each other

12. establishing a "homework hotline" staffed every day at the appropriate time (such as 3–7 p.m. or 4–9 p.m.) by teachers or peer tutors who speak the appropriate languages and can help students and families with assignments

13. establishing a reading room or homework center in a school or neighboring community facility (e.g., a public library or police station) where students can have a safe and quiet place to study, read, or get help with school work, especially in the late afternoon hours before many parents or other adults in the family return from work

14. locating community, private, and public youth-oriented organizations (e.g., clubs, religious and ethnic groups, sports leagues, local business owners or employers, job training projects) that operate in the same geographic area as the schools; working with them to find common ground and promote cooperative action for young people, especially at the middle and high school levels

15. ensuring that all forms of school outreach and community programs, such as the Drug education And REsistance (DARE) programs now popular in U.S. middle and secondary schools, are delivered in appropriate languages

16. creating occasions when the school is open to teachers, parents, students, and community members to celebrate the accomplishments of students and inform the community of what goes on in school, in all relevant languages and in interactive formats

17. providing consistent resources (money, time, other support) to train cadres of parents for positions of advocacy, initiative, and leadership and to train teachers to work with parents

18. working cooperatively with community-based or ethnic organizations on such efforts as dance, theater, and arts groups and sports and service clubs for young people

Community-Based Efforts to Establish Partnerships

The literature on partnerships indicates that it is difficult for institutions outside the school to have much impact on school practices, particularly in large and diverse urban settings. Still, there is a growing realization on the part of researchers, practitioners, and political leaders that it is essential to draw all sectors of a community—not just educators and families—into the educational process.

Countries differ in their patterns of educational governance and external community conditions, both of which affect potential partnership arrangements, but it is clearly up to teachers and schools to demonstrate an attitude of openness and willingness to work with those outside

the realm of professional education. The following suggestions are presented with the caveat that local conditions are the best guides to identifying possible participants and specific activities for partnerships.

Community-based organizations can, as feasible and appropriate, support partnerships by

1. requesting that members of any organization or agency with long-time roots in the neighborhood or community served by a particular school share their perspectives with school personnel (this, of course, means that school personnel must be ready to listen and engage in dialogue with these local experts)

2. offering school-linked programs on their own premises rather than in schools because some important participants (parents of young children, teens) may be reluctant to come to schools and feel much more comfortable in a community setting such as a recreation center, YMCA, or church

3. promoting the development of spokespersons and leaders from among their membership who can act as linguistic and cultural brokers with local schools

4. encouraging parents and families to pursue official citizenship, where relevant, and participate in the political processes of public discussion of and voting on school-related legislation and running for office, especially on local school boards, if appropriate

5. providing space for family-school-community activities outside of school hours and on weekends, especially when access to schools is limited by distance or safety considerations

Businesses

In the United States, some promising practices have been identified for one generally high-status group: businesses (most often large employers). Some of these efforts have been in place for a long time, but others

are recent recommendations related to the Goals 2000 movement. Employers can promote partnerships by

1. encouraging employees who are parents to participate in school activities and become involved in education, and providing flexible hours or accommodating work schedules to make this possible
2. encouraging all employees to volunteer time in local schools, using an agreed-upon allotment of time or similar incentives
3. cooperating with schools to offer child care so that parents can participate in meetings or classes or volunteer in schools
4. offering space at the workplace (a special room, or a corner of the employee lunchroom) for the establishment of a parent-community library, with materials in appropriate languages, to support parent-student literacy development and educational progress
5. providing financial support for the communications infrastructure (extra phone lines, a voice mail system, family newsletters) needed for frequent school-home-community communications
6. insisting that job training programs also include strong links and cooperative activities with local schools, especially secondary schools
7. providing scholarships to employees and their families to support further education

Labor Organizations and Unions

The presence and influence of organized labor varies greatly within the United States and in many other countries. Where unions exist, they can promote various forms of educational and community partnerships both independently and in collaboration with employers, following the suggestions similar to those noted for employers.

Teacher Education Institutions as Contributors to Partnerships

Although many teachers have developed over years of practice effective methods for building partnerships, this area remains absent from most teacher training programs. Thus many teachers, including most new teachers, are often puzzled as to how to interact with parents and community members regarding their children's education. Teacher training institutions therefore have a major role to play in equipping teachers with the sensitivity, knowledge, and skills they will need to participate in partnerships. Some of the actions they can initiate are

1. including serious and sustained attention to parent and community partnerships during pre- and in-service education for teachers through course work and development and supervised practice of related professional pedagogical and communication skills

2. recruiting and, where possible, hiring members of local linguistic minority communities to assist in developing and implementing appropriate local models of partnerships

3. promoting the establishment of special courses requiring field work and regular interaction for teachers in the languages and cultures of locally important language minority communities and in the research methods needed to identify community resources

4. developing a range of internship opportunities in partnership-building activities for teacher candidates as a part of student employment, credit-bearing programs, or service learning

5. providing the assistance of scholars in areas such as anthropology, education, folklore, languages, linguistics, and psychology to offer expertise in the research methods needed to identify community cultural capital and resources to enhance the curriculum

6. encouraging faculty members at teacher education institutions to direct their own research and practice toward matters of family and community partnerships in their localities

7. promoting action research models in which faculty members and students carry out community-oriented research and share their results regularly with local teachers and community members (e.g., Gonzalez et al., 1993; Heath, 1983, 1990)

Educational Associations

Educational associations, whether organized around a particular level of education, a geographic locality or a discipline such as reading or math, may wish to add explicit attention to partnerships to their charge. The appropriateness of so doing depends on the association's mission and goals.

Membership and Representation

Educational associations that seek to devise serious and consistent guidelines for building partnerships require the ongoing involvement of parents and community members in leadership and consultative positions. Hence, associations should consider ways to incorporate the perspectives of parents and community members through various forms of membership and representation. Among them:

1. appointing a small working group of educational association members and linguistic minority parent and community advocates to continue work in this area, locate additional relevant materials, and advise the association

2. designating a seat on the association's executive board for a parent representative, determining how to elect or select such a representative, and encouraging local affiliates to do the same

3. encouraging association interest section leaders to be further involved by asking members to provide information on effective partnership practices, organizing related convention sessions at national and local affiliate conferences, and including articles in their newsletters about partnerships

4. instituting a special membership category with reduced fees for parents who are not professional educators and encouraging local affiliates to do the same

5. establishing a program of competitive grants within the association to be awarded on a regular basis to members seeking to create new partnerships—especially partnerships tailored to links with academic curricular areas—and requiring recipients to share their experiences through presentations and publications

6. requesting that a committee on standards develop a position for the association on the role of school-home-community partnerships in ESL programs for students and the integration of teacher education for partnerships into ESL certification and endorsement

7. requesting that a sociopolitical concerns committee assist in defining other issues relevant to partnerships and in locating exemplary partnership programs of various types

Conventions

For many educational and professional associations, the annual or biennial conference is one of the principal formats through which members can update professional skills and knowledge and network with others interested in similar topics. Accordingly, organizations seeking to emphasize the importance of partnerships can do so by

1. inviting scholars, researchers, and practitioners with expertise in partnerships to speak at international, national, regional, and local educational conferences (a list of U.S. experts in partnerships is included on pp. 43–46; state and local educational organizations may wish to compile and publicize similar lists for their own locations)

2. inviting parents, teacher aides (who often work part-time for relatively low wages), and advocates from language minority communities to share their concerns at convention plenary sessions, colloquia, or panels and paying their expenses for doing so

3. making school-home-community partnerships a recognized and featured strand at the annual conference and at affiliate conferences; working with local school authorities to sponsor participation by parents and family and community advocates at conferences

4. commissioning pre-convention institutes presented by both educators and advocates for language minority communities in order to share effective practices in community partnerships

5. sponsoring site visits to successful partnership programs of various types as a pre-convention activity

6. establishing designated travel awards or scholarships for parents and community advocates to attend national educational conventions and local affiliate conferences and encouraging local school authorities to do the same

7. planning social as well as academic events for parent and community representatives at all conferences as well as special newcomer convention orientation—with child care provided if appropriate—to promote informal discussion and networking

Publications

Some educational organizations have active publication programs to inform their members and the public of current trends, controversies, techniques, and resources. For such organizations, promotion of effective partnerships can be accomplished through

1. publishing an easy-reference brochure or booklet, in English and other relevant languages, listing current resources on partnerships

2. commissioning articles on partnerships for all appropriate educational association publications

3. instituting a regular column on parent and family involvement in an association newsletter or similar publication to facilitate continual information exchange and discussion about family and community partnerships and encouraging affiliate newsletters to do the same

4. commissioning and publishing, in English and other languages as appropriate, a collection of case studies illustrating a range of successful school-home-community partnerships at various educational levels and with various linguistic minority community configurations

5. developing and publishing, in English and other relevant languages, TESOL's own parent- and practitioner-oriented resource guides and how-to materials in print and electronic media for establishing and sustaining community partnerships

Coalitions

Professional educational organizations and community-based coalitions need to work together to develop successful partnerships with language minority communities. Steps to take include

1. forming advocacy coalitions that bring together educational and professional groups and community-based organizations to promote public emphasis and resource support for school-home-community partnerships

2. creating advisory councils with members of educational and community-based organizations, including parents and community advocates, to work with teacher training institutions in making substantive pre- and in-service teacher education for partnerships an integral part of teacher formation programs

3. sponsoring joint publications with other organizations, in appropriate languages, aimed at various relevant national and local constituencies

Summary: Effective Partnerships

Effective partnerships of educators, learners, families, and other community members take many forms. In some cases, they are aimed at supporting traditional types of parental involvement, such as tutoring activities in the home or provisions of classes in child development or ESL for parents. This is the conventional view of parent involvement still found in much literature.

In other settings, partnerships involve efforts to redefine relationships and curricula based on local resources and knowledge. Educators have begun to discover that recognizing and valuing the learners' home language and culture is essential, and that such recognition can guide long-term efforts of mutual discovery and systemic educational reform. This transformative view is beginning to shape the views and practices of many educators. Although these two approaches differ in theoretical rationale and orientation, the actual activities involved with each approach may show considerable overlap, depending on how they are realized.

Obstacles to effective school-family-community partnerships are numerous. They include attitudinal, structural, and resource constraints. In many countries, though, local educators—often working with researchers or specially designated government personnel—have created and sustained relationships that support the academic and social progress of learners in different ways.

The coalitions associated with effective partnerships are often fragile, depending on the charismatic leadership and commitment of a few people and often on additional external resources not available to most teachers and schools. Nevertheless, the urgent need to improve educational outcomes for all students demands that educators learn to create and participate in various kinds of partnerships with students, family and community members, and each other.

Final Thoughts and Continuing Concerns

This report comes at a time when the topic of partnerships pervades educational discourse. We have found that the meanings of partnership vary and can include almost anything from traditional home tutoring activities to much more sweeping redefinitions of the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved in education. However partnerships are defined, they require educators to develop abilities to communicate and collaborate with new audiences, an area in which most teachers and administrators have never been trained. Partnership programs have been effective to the degree that educators can establish a school and

classroom atmosphere of acceptance and respect and develop specific and realistic courses of action for teachers, students, and families. These goals have proven challenging even when teachers and parents share the same language and similar cultures, in part because educational systems and educators have usually ignored, resisted, or redefined pressures from groups outside of education. Add to this the issues arising from linguistic and cultural differences, and it becomes clear that for second language professionals, the tasks required to promote effective partnerships will demand flexibility, creativity, and persistence.

The widespread interest in partnerships also occurs at a time when many governments are struggling to provide more—and more sophisticated—education to more students with ever tighter budgets. Because successful partnership programs have often depended on additional funds and personnel, the call to establish partnerships inevitably raises questions of the resource support available. Given these conditions, efforts to establish partnerships probably require educators to identify new combinations of in-kind as well as direct support for partnership programs.

Necessary resources for partnerships are not just financial, though. Perhaps even more crucial is the intangible but essential climate of respect for students and families, a commitment to working with family and community members, and a realistic and clearly articulated vision of the differentiated but intertwined roles of educators, students, and families. There is no simple recipe for this. Educational professionals must develop flexible discovery procedures to identify the cultural and linguistic funds of knowledge relevant to the students and the communities represented in their classrooms, recognize the individual and group variation in that knowledge, and, in collaboration with students, families, community members, and each other, determine how such expanded understanding can and should shape the learning environment and pedagogical choices they make. By implementing the recommendations made here, organizations can begin the task of providing policy leadership and practical support for ESL educators who seek to define, build, and sustain productive partnerships between them and the

many communities they serve. Educators and members of professional organizations must also find ways to involve parents and advocates for linguistic minority communities directly in all related future efforts. Their insights, criticisms, participation, and support are essential if this initiative is to flourish.

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Toll-Free and On-line Information Sources on Family Literacy and Community Partnership Issues

ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education
Toll-Free: 1-800-583-4135
E-mail: ericece@ux1.cso.uiuc.edu

National Parent Information Network, NPIN
URL: http://ericps.ed.uiuc.edu/npin/npinhome.html

ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication
Toll-Free: 1-800-759-4723
E-mail: ericcs@ucs.indiana.edu
URL: http://www.indiana.edu/~eric_rec

ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools
Toll-Free: 1-800-624-9120
E-mail: lanhamb@ael.org
URL: http://www.ael.org//eric/liberty.htm

ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education
Toll-Free: 1-800-601-4868
E-mail: eric-cue@columbia.edu
URL: http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu

Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Chapter 1 (Compensatory Education)
Toll-Free: 1-800-456-2380
E-mail: preinc@delphi.com

Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education
E-mail: ncle@cal.org
URL: http://www.cal.org/ncle/

National Clearinghouse on Bilingual Education
Toll-Free: 1-800-321-6223
E-mail: askncbe@ncbe.gwu.edu
URL: http://www.ncbe.gwu.edu

U.S. Department of Education, Family Involvement Partnership for Learning Initiative
Toll-Free: 1-800-USA-LEARN

Note: Phone numbers and addresses were current when this paper went to press, but may have been changed in the interim. Please be advised that Net addresses and sites change frequently.

Partnership Resources

These U.S. researchers, scholars, and practitioners have considerable expertise in school-home-community partnerships. They can address professional groups and agencies interested in this area and provide further information on general approaches and specific language communities according to their individual specialties. (Note: Their inclusion on this list does not commit them to any specific speaking engagement or educational consulting; those arrangements are to be settled between them and any groups requesting their assistance.)

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The TESOL Task Force on Partnerships With Linguistic Minority Communities

The TESOL Task Force on Partnerships With Linguistic Minority Communities, chaired by Mary McGroarty, was created in 1995 by Fred Genessee, then President of TESOL. The 16 members of the task force conferred throughout 1995-1996 to identify the prevailing practices and to generate related recommendations for the TESOL Board's consideration. Their conclusions form the basis of this document.

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The full text of the original Task Force Report is available on the TESOL Internet site, and may be accessed at the following URL: http://www.tesol.edu/pubs/bkpromos/readingroom.html.

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